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ABSTRACT

This selective review of literature presents research and theory in support of the proposition that language is an essential component of early artistic development, and is crucial to the nature and nurture of visual expression. Young children frequently accompany drawing activities with descriptive, reflective, and social conversation, verbally monitoring, supplementing, and sharing the progress of their marks. In this paper, four themes are discussed: (1) the role of talk in the transition from the nonrepresentational exuberance of early scribbles (marking) to the intentional symbolization of objects and events (drawing); (2) the impact of adult presence and involvement on the drawing processes of young children; (3) the possibility that young children exhibit particular styles of talking about their art; and (4) the recommendations offered by researchers and theorists concerning ways to engage children in dialogue about their art. The review proposes the encouragement of young children's natural tendency to talk about the process of making art as a foundation for teaching art in the early years. Adults' efforts to understand the nature of children's art and further children's development would benefit from recognizing and joining in the dialogue through which children name, ponder, initiate, and pursue the creation of visual form. (RH)

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"I Make a Mark:" The Significance of Talk in Young Children's Artistic Development

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Abstract

Young children frequently accompany drawing activities with descriptive, reflective, and social conversation, verbally monitoring, supplementing, and sharing the progress of their marks. This review of literature presents research and theory in support of the proposition that language is an essential component of early artistic development, crucial to the nature and nurture of visual expression. Consideration of the developmental significance of young children's talk about their art suggests that appropriate forms of dialogue between adults and children in artmaking contexts may provide a foundation for understanding and facilitating artistic activity in the early years.

"I Make a Mark:" The Significance of Talk in Young Children's Artistic Development

"I make a line. I make a blue line. I make a dot. . .dot, dot, dot. I make a mark."

With seven months' experience as a scribbler behind him, 18-month-old Paul frequently chanted to himself as he drew. Often his monologues were purely formal, as he noted the existence, the color, or length of a freshly inscribed line, distinguishing it from dots produced by an altogether different form of contact between crayon and paper. He had, perhaps, learned that these were "proper" things to say about a work of art. His parents, eager to avoid the suggestion that such marks should--or even could--be used to depict objects, aware that Paul would arrive at that conclusion in his own time, responded to his scribbles with the enthusiasm of delighted patrons and the vocabulary of seasoned formalists. Paul had grown accustomed to the rituals through which his work was received by the adults around him: "What did you do? You made some beautiful marks. And look at these dots. They're great orange dots. How did you make them?"

This form of appreciative banter intentionally focused on what was there to be seen in Paul's drawings: dots, lines of varying length and direction, often of different colors, placed in a particular configuration within the boundaries of the page. As these dialogues continued and evolved in response to changes in Paul's marks, it became apparent that the talk

which surrounded his drawing activity accomplished more than had been explicitly intended. It introduced and enhanced a basic sensory vocabulary, allowing Paul to distinguish colors, lines, dots, and shapes independently at an early age. It reinforced Paul's realization that, having performed an action once, "I can do it again," a notion that Schutz (1970) considered essential to feelings of competence. It suggested that reflection is firmly intertwined in the process of making art and that this reflective turning toward the objects of one's experience is often accomplished by putting the experience into words. Finally, most importantly, it validated the worth of Paul's activity and celebrated his achievements.

What these dialogues apparently failed to accomplish was the staying of Paul's developmental course until its appointed time. Convinced of the intrinsic value of scribbling, cognizant of the confusion popularly held to result in the mind of a prerepresentational child asked to attribute content to his marks, Paul's parents studiously refrained from insinuating that potential images lay buried somewhere in the tangle of his scribbles. Yet Paul was not to be so easily deceived. At 16 months, kneeling to draw on his chalkboard, Paul executed a particularly energetic calligraphic stroke, sat back to survey what he had done, and declared it "a cat." Two months later, within days of his soliloquy on mark-making, Paul accompanied the formation of two sets of blue concentric circles atop a sausage-shaped oblong with the announcement, "Two eyes. . .a mouth." In the first instance, as in many of the "named" scribbles produced by children embarking on the transition to representational drawing, even an intensely

interested and informed observer would have been hard-pressed to detect a visual resemblance between Paul's rapidly inscribed marks and a cat. Although the eyes and mouth were properly aligned and the individual elements embodied certain characteristics of their referents, the second image would also have remained indecipherable without the labels that Paul provided.

As Dyson observed, "young children are symbol weavers. Their 'drawings' may be composed, not only of lines and colors, but of language as well" (1986, p. 381). An understanding of the personal and social functions of children's talk about their art is crucial to those adults concerned with the nature and nurture of early symbolic development. As young children accompany, direct and amplify their drawing activities through words, they consolidate and communicate the process of thought enacted in their drawings. Dimondstein maintained that participation in the arts facilitates both "communion with self and communication with others" (1974, p. 3). These ontological strivings, which constitute children's "reasons for making art" (Leeds, 1986, p. 17), are fully disclosed only in the richly informative contexts in which the act of drawing takes place. Many twentieth century adults have discovered that the art of young children is beautiful in its directness, charming in its incongruities, intriguing in its resemblance to forms created by primitive and modernist artists alike. Others have contributed to a significant body of information on the genesis of graphic imagery as they have examined and categorized drawings produced by millions of anonymous children. Yet the knowledge to be obtained in this

manner is intrinsically limited, both in its reliance on the formal qualities of children's work and, perhaps, in its relevance to parents, teachers and researchers whose concern for the children in their care must transcend the delectations of the connoisseur.

As Beittel acknowledged, an informed and productive understanding of the art of preschool children requires repeated participation in drawing events: "We need the series perspective, the context, and the preschooler's spontaneous verbalizations and verbal responses for an essentially neutral observer to adequately grasp what has been done" (1973, p. 141). Freeman (1980) found active observation essential to his investigation of young children's responses to the task demands of the drawing situation. Anecdotes offered by Winner (1986) suggest that witnesses to the drawing process may discover exceptions and adjuncts to the developmental process that escape detection through formal analysis of drawings. Adult presence in the drawing situation, seldom wholly incidental to studies of children's artistic development, has become the norm in recent research concerned with the expansion and refinement of our understanding of child art.

This selective review of literature examines research and theory relevant to the issue of young children's talk about their art. Four themes will be discussed: (1) the role of talk in the transition from "marking" to "drawing", from the nonrepresentational exuberance of early scribbles to the intentional symbolization of objects and events; (2) the impact of adult presence and involvement on the drawing process of young children; imagery; (3) the possibility that young children exhibit particular styles of

talking about their art; and (4) the recommendations offered by researchers and theorists concerning ways to engage children in dialogue about their art. Finally, it will be proposed that encouragement of young children's natural tendency to talk through and about the process of making art provides the foundation for teaching, and for understanding, art in the early years.

From Marking to Drawing: The Emergence of Young Children's Talk about their Art

For many children, the activity of scribbling predates the acquisition of a fluent and functional vocabulary through which they might describe, much less interpret, the marks they make. Kellogg proposed that "babies waving their arms would make these scribbles if an instrument could record where and how their fingertips move through the air" (1970, p.14). A crucial transformation typically occurs early in the second year of life when the child concludes that the marking instrument, inedible though it may be, produces other gratifying effects when applied to paper. The child's first marks may record an accidental collision between tool and paper, yet the results are satisfying enough to merit repetition. In Lowenfeld's widely accepted description of the sub-stages of scribbling, this initial period of exploration is designated as "random" or "disorderly" (1957, p.86). The haphazard, disjunct quality of these earliest scribbles connotes their origin in uncontrolled muscular activity: they are traces of kinetic energy. Approximately six months later, children who have had occasion to pursue this pleasurable activity begin to exert greater control over their marks,

consciously repeating and placing certain favored configurations. Lowenfeld observed that longitudinal marks tend to precede circular forms in this substage of "controlled" (1957, p.87) scribbling, when visual and motor control first begin to interact in the scribbling process.

These initial phases of scribbling, believed to be universal in occurrence, remain enigmatic to most interpreters of children's artistic development. Kellogg (1970) attributed the cursory treatment of scribbling afforded by most art educators, including Lowenfeld, to prejudicial attitudes toward children's non-pictorial work. It may be equally as significant that random and controlled scribbling, unlike the stages to follow, are attended by little or no verbalization on the part of the child, and are subsequently less accessible to adult understanding.

Kellogg (1970) insisted that the final substage of scribbling described by Lowenfeld (1957) was, in fact, the spurious result of adult interference in the child's spontaneous development. However, Lowenfeld was adamant in his belief that "scribbling should not be interfered with" (1957, p. 93), that it constituted an intrinsically engaging activity, and followed its own inexorably educational path. Most art educators sanction this view and concur with the recommendation that children's art be allowed to unfold through its early, clearly biological stages. The majority agree also with Lowenfeld's contention that the final substage of scribbling, in which children begin to attach names to their marks, occurs without overt prompting from adults and signifies a decisive change in children's thought.

At some point, usually between the ages of 3 and 4, the child will notice

and announce a correspondence between the marks she has made and some entity known and experienced outside the drawing situation. The cat or train or person which emerges to the child's eye may well elude detection by the most scrupulously attentive adult. The labyrinth of marks enclosing the drawing surface is unlikely to have yielded appreciably the impenetrable front it presented earlier the same day. Yet suddenly an entry has been provided. The child has happened upon the concept of depiction, and, in the excitement of her discovery, has extended a lead for the adult to follow.

Intimations of this tendency to decipher recognizable images in scribbles occur well before naming becomes habitual, as Paul's recognition of the cat on his chalkboard indicates. Gardner recounted the labels his son assigned to drawings made between the ages of 17 to 27 months, concluding that, "such allusions, made quite regularly, disclose a clear ability and inclination on the part of the 'pre-representational' child to speak about his drawings and about the act of drawing itself" (1980, p. 46). To the extent that the child's commentary is directed toward another person, her conversation also discloses understanding of the social context in which young children's drawing activity occurs and finds support. In most cases, the young child's drawing activity is supervised, and often initiated, by an adult. The child of 3 has not only experienced "the joy of being a cause" (Copple, Sigel & Saunders, 1979, p. 46), the personal reward that attends the creation of form; she has also discovered that others share the excitement generated by such concrete proofs of her efficacy. As Gardner

noted, the child soon recognizes in her drawing an occasion for shared experience:

> Even as he scans the room eagerly for recognition and approval when he has uttered a word, spilled a glass of water, or shut out the light, so too, he seeks to establish a link with others by virtue of his drawing. . .What is important here is the drawing's link to communication--its role in social exchange (1980, p. 24).

Brittain (1979) observed that prior to age 3, children appear to find the activity of drawing sufficient in itself; 3-year-olds begin to actively seek adult response to their increasingly representational work.

As the child begins to designate content in her scribbles, she bridges the gap of perhaps two to three years that separates "the perception of pictorial symbols and their production by the child" (Gardner, 1980, p. 56). The 18-month-old child who recognizes "catness" in the diverse illustrational styles found in her picture books is unlikely to translate that knowledge to her own graphic interpretation of a cat for more than a year. Gardner suggested that the relatively prolonged incubation of visual symbolization may be due to the peculiar demands of the drawing situation. An experiment proposed by Arnheim (1974) indicates that this phenomenon cannot be fully explained by the immaturity of the child's motor function: adults asked to draw a human ear while holding a pencil between their toes will not produce the simplified equivalent of an ear favored by young children. Rather there is a logic to children's art, dependent upon a leisurely process of mastery and consolidation, which leads to the

production of forms which incorporate essential structural features of their referents. The stage of "arbitrary" naming (Gardner, 1980, p. 49) heralds the child's accelerating movement toward this goal, indicating that the child has grasped the possibilities inherent in the stages to follow. Lowenfeld concluded that the naming of scribbles provides evidence that "the child's thinking has completely changed... from a kinesthetic thinking, in terms of motions, to an imaginative thinking in terms of pictures" (1957, p. 90). She is now capable of summoning absent realities to the bounded space of the drawing page. She has seized the power to invent worlds.

The advent of naming presents opportunities for expanded forms of dialogue with the scribbling child. While lines, colors, shapes, movements and the experience of drawing are appropriate topics for conversation with young scribblers, it is now possible, following the verbal clues provided by the child, to discuss the content of drawings as well. The identity of a named scribble tends to be elusive to the child as well as the adult. Young children recognize imagery in their drawings in much the same manner as they might "discern a resemblance to a real-life entity in some accidentally encountered configuration in [their] surroundings" (Gardner, 1980, p. 49). Interpretations emerge most commonly as afterthoughts, and are subject to change. Smith characterized the role of the adult in responding to the 3-year-old's narrated drawings:

> With the development of symbolization, it is particularly important to try to understand the child's thought. In visual media the transition to symbolization begins as the children offer names for their

> nonrepresentational configurations. They have no intention to represent. They draw and then associate a meaning to the finished drawing. In time they come to reverse this process, drawing a configuration to fit an intended subject. However, the relation between drawing and subject is still very personal and arbitrary, making it difficult for adults to understand and respond. The teacher should try to elicit some verbal clues from the child to determine what is intended (1980, p. 95-6).

Chapman (1978) considered the formulation of a specific intention prior to drawing a salient characteristic of the next phase of artistic development. She explained:

> The <u>early expressive</u> stage of development is the period during which children formulate ideas for expression <u>before</u> they begin to work and are therefore conscious of the need to discover visual means to communicate what they have in mind. About 30 percent of all 4-year-olds and about 80 percent of all 5-year-olds have something in mind before they begin to create a work (1978, p. 145).

Children of 4 or 5 years have mastered a basic vocabulary of graphic forms, now drawn in outline, which may be combined in various ways to symbolize significant objects: humans, animals, vegetation, dwellings, modes of transportation. They have progressed through a phase in which a single object, a face or a figure, inhabited the page in isolation. They are engaged in a transition from the eclectic gathering of objects on a page, the associational groupings Kellogg and O'Dell termed "almost pictures"

(1967, p. 77), to the establishment of meaningful relationships among objects situated in a clearly communicative context which Kellogg and O'Dell called "pictures" (1967, p. 85). This process will continue through the early elementary school years, as children progress through the stages Lowenfeld described as "preschematic" (1957, p. 108) and "schematic" (1957, p. 132). Much that children accomplish in these later stages of development is apparent in their drawings, in the acquisition and expansion of graphic vocabularies and in their increasing attentiveness to contextual and compositional clarity. Yet as these children continue to search for "representational concepts" (Arnheim, 1974, p. 169) compatible with their intentions, the role of the adult remains crucial. As children begin to offer narrative accounts to accompany, explain and supplement their drawings, the adult who lends a receptive ear and an appropriate response may reinforce "their awareness that visual forms are related to life experiences" (Chapman, 1978, p. 145), that the drawings they create and the stories they tell enable them to expand and share their unique perspectives on the world. Equally, this responsive adult, attuned to the symbol weaving enveloping the child at work, may learn much about the thought that is enacted and the growth that is nurtured within the context of children's art.

Between Adult and Child: Dialogical Aspects of the Art Process

Tizard and Hughes chose to focus their study of 4-year-old girls' conversations with their mothers and nursery school teachers on "the role of the adult in giving meaning to the child's experience" (1984, p. 22).

Hawkins emphasized the significance of this role:

> The adult's function, in the child's learning, is to provide a kind of external loop, to provide a selective feedback. The child's involvement gets some response from an adult and this in turn is made available to the child. The child is learning about himself through his joint effects on the non-human and the human world around him (1973, p. 366).

Although this ability "to respond diagnostically and helpfully to a child's behavior" (Hawkins, 1973, p. 366) has long been recognized as essential to art teaching, relatively few studies have attended explicitly to the nature of dialogues between teachers and children in art-making contexts. This is a curious omission in a field which continues to advocate techniques of verbal motivation developed by Cizek (see Viola, 1936) and Lowenfeld (1957) and to rely heavily on the studio critique as an evaluative procedure. Art education textbooks typically include excerpts of classroom dialogue, and at least two volumes (Barkan, 1960; Dimondstein, 1974) are substantially devoted to transcriptions of classroom talk. Prospective teachers in art education and those related fields typically served by art education departments are routinely introduced to certain maxims which have assumed the status of conventional wisdom. Primary among these are the proposition that a scribbling child should never be asked, "What is it?", and the corollary assumption that no child should suffer the affront of being asked to account for a drawing. As Anderson (1986) pointed out, such prohibitions have arisen largely through misinterpretation of the progressive and child-centered traditions of art education, particularly of the influential

writings of Lowenfeld. However, it remains true that the typifications which surround the uses of language in art education insinuate that a natural antagonism exists between visual and verbal modes of expression. This is an issue which begs clarification, for as Ecker acknowledged, "there is evidence suggesting that language functions in a variety of ways that affect children's growth and development in art" (1979, p. 111).

Preschool children are often invited by adults to draw or paint or model anything they wish, to engage in the type of activity Lark-Horovitz, Lewis and Luca termed "free or voluntary" (1973, p. 35). Golomb (1974) studied the response of children between the ages of 2 and 5 years to a number of "directed" (Lark-Horovitz, Lewis and Luca, 1973, p. 35) tasks, in which representations of the human figure were specifically solicited by the investigator. Many of the children in Golomb's study had yet to produce a human in their spontaneous work, rendering the adult's request doubly demanding. Outright refusals and confessions of incapacity--"I can't, too difficult" (Golomb, 1974, p. 5)--were not uncommon, although many children continued to scribble or manipulate their portion of playdough until they obtained a form or a plan they were content to share: "I'm gonna make a baby, a very small one, one year old, then it grows up to be two" (Golomb, 1974, p. 6).

Golomb discovered that children used a variety of "pseudo-representational devices" (1974, p. 8), both linguistic and gestural, in order to meet the demands of the task. The youngest participants, 2 to 3 years old, were engrossed in the manipulation of materials, and manifested no

personal interest in representation. Yet they engaged in "romancing" when "pressed by an adult to account for their scribbles" (Golomb, 1974, p. 4). According to Golomb, romancing constitutes a "forced interpretation of the scribble-picture" (1974, p. 5), an ingenious way of satisfying a request that the child understands vaguely but recognizes to be beyond her ability. Thus, the child will invent stories to "make something" of a scribble or blob, spinning yarns with no visible connection to the qualities of the form itself. Golomb considered "imitative actions" (1974, p. 7) performed with playdough to be similar in their interpretive function. The 2-year-old who bounces a clay column across the table to simulate a rabbit's hop is using motion as the romancing child uses language -- "in lieu of representation or as an aid to it" (Golomb, 1974 p. 7). Golomb found these to be relatively fleeting transitional behaviors, soon eclipsed by others more closely tied to the look of the child's product. "Reading off" (Golomb, 1974, p. 9) involves the familiar tactic of naming scribbles: an interpretation, often unrelated to the topic originally proposed, is offered after the child has completed a scribble, based upon her recognition of meaning in the accidental visual properties of the object. "Verbal designation" (Golomb, 1974, p. 9), the most sophisticated of these pseudo-representational devices, indicates that the child has kept the task in mind throughout the drawing process, but is willing to supply verbally parts of the subject she failed to render visually.

Although these forms of discourse appeared in the context of a particular experimental situation, they are similar to the naming behaviors previously described. Golomb implied that these verbal maneuvers occur in children's

spontaneous artmaking, and their appearance in the context of the directive requests regularly made by parents and teachers of young children is to be expected. It should be noted that Golomb did not specifically seek verbal amplifications of the art process, but the situation of drawing or modelling in the presence of an interested adult appeared to elicit conversation from children. Golomb concluded that the transition to representational drawing is facilitated by talk:

> Verbalizations reflect the child's perception of a discrepancy--a gap between his desire to draw a visually meaningful figure and the imperfect outcome. Because the child astutely perceives the imperfections and limitations in his early work, it needs clarification, correction and completion on the verbal level. Verbalizations are thus intended to bring about a better fit between object and representation. (1976, p. 23).

The effect of explicit adult intervention on the rate of young children's symbolic development was studied by Dubin (1946). Spontaneous paintings collected from 52 preschool children were classified according to a developmental taxonomy proposed by Monroe in 1929. Monroe emphasized the contribution of language to young children's art, maintaining that talk serves a compensatory function until the representational stage when the visual qualities of pictures conform to the explanations children offer.

As each of the 26 children in Dubin's experimental group completed a painting, the researcher assigned the work to the appropriate stage, basing this judgment on the painting itself and the child's response to the request,

"Tell me about your picture" (1946, p. 168). This information determined the course of the dialogue which followed as the researcher attempted to lead the child to the next developmental level by drawing out and finally stating the essential characteristic of that stage.

Dubin found that the children who participated in these dialogues progressed through Monroe's stages at a rate 3 1/2 times that observed in the control group. Dubin concluded that easel painting is "sufficiently highly-developed and yet sufficiently malleable" (1946, p. 173) to be influenced by training as early as age 2. Acceleration of the developmental process was not the only outcome of the study however. Children in the experimental group created twice as many paintings as their peers in the weeks that followed.

Observational studies conducted by Brittain (1979) and associates at the Cornell Nursery School confirm and illuminate the increased interest that Dubin noted. Brittain attached tape recorders to nursery school easels in an effort to document the monologues presumed to occur as children paint, only to find that "the creative process was nonverbal if there was no adult discussing the painting with child or helping to arrange another sheet of paper" (1979, p. 9). Children seemed eager to discuss their work at the slightest provocation. When Brittain's research assistants sat with individual children, quietly describing the evolution of each child's drawing into a tape recorder, the adults' commentary was immediately countered and clarified by the children. The neutral formal descriptions offered by the researchers apparently failed to honor the children's pictorial intentions,

and were soon corrected.

Sustained observation of preschool classes convinced Brittain that children spend twice as much time painting when an adult is present. He advocated dialogue during the drawing process, emphasizing that the teacher should offer support or advice "only when the child seemed hesitant about either his own powers or the next direction to take" (1979, p. 160). This intervention appeared to be most productive when it was "clearly geared toward the purposes and direction of the child himself, and was not of the evaluative or command type which often turned children away from participation" (1979, p. 160). The listing of multiple possibilities, couched in the form of questions, seemed a particularly effective means of preserving the child's autonomy while presenting a number of issues to consider as she continued the drawing.

Clearly, Brittain recognized that exceptional tact is required on the part of the adult if the child's sense of agency is to be enhanced rather than usurped through the questioning process. Sevigny's (1981) ethnographic study of university art classes documented the styles of interaction that studio instructors adopt in order "to patrol and monitor the degree of performance flexibility students will be allowed for interpreting the assignment into art forms" (p. 7). While some of the behaviors Sevigny described are unique to the university classroom, the ambiguity of teachers' talk about art and the confusion that results as students attempt to decipher intended meanings can and does occur in early childhood classrooms as well (see Tizard and Hughes, 1984). Some disequilibrium of

perspectives is inevitable in human conversation. The crucial question in the context of this discussion is whether young children require the support and direction of adults to proceed with art activity, and whether the risk of interference in the developmental process is justified by the results described by Golomb (1974), Dubin (1946), and Brittain (1979).

Two studies summarized by Donaldson (1978) lend support to the belief that young children respond positively to adult presence and sincere human interest in their art. Lepper and others in 1973 examined the effects of asking children to draw in competition for a prize. Not only did these children display a marked aversion to drawing as a spontaneous activity following the study, they also produced work of diminished quality for the contest itself (a phenomenon regularly observed by art teachers). Anderson, Manoogian, and Reznick confirmed and extended these findings in a 1976 study, discovering that children who won praise for their drawings subsequently produced work of higher quality and exhibited increased interest in drawing activities.

Donaldson speculated that these reactions spring from deeply human needs for contact and affirmation which are not served by impersonally bestowed awards:

> Perhaps it is relevant to an understanding of the difference between words of praise and gold stars to draw a distinction between reward and recognition and to acknowledge how strong a need we have to communicate achievement to our fellow men and see it confirmed in their eyes. Thus, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who considered that his

> vocation as a Jesuit was incompatible with the publication of his poetry in his lifetime, reveals in his letters. . . how hard this was for him: "There is a point with me in manners of any size when I must absolutely have encouragement as much as crops rain. . ." He goes on bravely, ". . .afterwards I am independent." But many of us do not reach this kind of independence ever. And young children are certainly unlikely to have done so (1978, p. 123-4).

It is not surprising, then, that Anderson et. al. found adult disinterest to be most detrimental of all to children's confident participation in drawing. Children asked to draw by a researcher who originally professed interest in the way boys and girls draw pictures tried valiantly to elicit some recognition from this adult, who now turned away, too busy to look. How often similar rebuffs occur in homes and classrooms, and to what effect, is worthy of consideration.

Some More than Others? Stylistic Differences in Young Children's Talk

Wolf and Gardner contended that "it is conceivable that there are behavioral differences which arise early, exhibit stability, and affect critical aspects of growth and the course of development" (1979, p. 118). Studies conducted by Gardner and associates under the auspices of Harvard Project Zero suggest that as early as age 3, children tend to gravitate noticeably toward either a visual or verbal--a "configurational" or "narrational" (Wolf and Gardner, 1979, p. 121)--approach to symbolic play. Gardner (1980) acknowledged that some children display no clear preference for either orientation and others vacillate between the two. However, he remained

convinced that these differences, first identified in longitudinal case studies of 9 children from their first to their sixth birthdays, are widespread and consequential.

Gardner maintained that stylistic differences between "patterners" and "dramatists" (1980, p. 47) account for the fact that "verbal elaboration of drawings does not occur with equal frequency, nor on analogous occasions, in all youngsters" (1980, p. 47). Visually-oriented "patterners," according to Gardner, are less likely than "dramatists" to talk about their drawings, more likely to allow visual forms to speak for themselves, and perhaps less inclined to fret about the communicative impact of their work. Gardner noted that "patterners" tend to:

> Enjoy exploring visual possibilities, taking a line in varying directions, and this activity usually suffices for them; they feel relatively little need to label their products. Sensitive to the gap between their drawings and the visual configuration of real objects, they are unlikely to label their drawings spontaneously but may well "romance" just to silence or appease their elders. In contrast. . [dramatists] find the social interchange surrounding drawing as engrossing as the activity itself (1980, p. 47-8).

These preferences are demonstrated not only in drawing events but in all of a child's symbolic play: blocks which serve as units for elaborate constructions for the patterner become props for story-telling in the hands of a dramatist.

Gardner implied that patterners and dramatists have, by the age of 3,

established distinctive forms of relationship to the social world. Dramatists, he contends, display a hardy interest in social contact and relish the opportunity to share their lively imaginative play through drawings. "Patterners, on the other hand, seem almost to spurn the world of social relations, preferring instead to immerse (and perhaps lose) themselves in the world of (usually visual) patterns" (Gardner, 1980 p. 47).

Dyson (1986) found the patterner/dramatist distinction useful as an explanatory construct in multiple case studies of the drawing, talk, and story dictations of kindergarten children involved in journal activities. However, her findings suggest that these styles are not as definitive, nor the social prospects of the patterner as dire, as Gardner indicated. None of the three children Dyson observed were totally mute as they drew. One child did confine his remarks primarily to monitoring the progress of his own drawings and commenting on the adequacy of his marks. The stories he dictated were brief and succinct, with little dramatic elaboration; he seemed to invest his energy in the drawings themselves and to regard the final step of dictation as superfluous. Dyson considered this child a patterner.

The other children both accompanied their drawings with a great deal of social banter, but differed significantly in the visual richness of the drawings they created and the forms of narrative they chose. Regina created detailed drawings typical of children her age, representing a world inhabited by characters frozen with the time and space of the page. Her talk was also static, descriptive of the moment in time she was recording.

The boy, Jesse, produced the type of minimal, gestural drawing that Gardner considered "typical dramatist" (1980, p. 48): scant visual information supported by a dynamic action-centered commentary on events unfolding in time. Dyson reported that, for Jesse, "drawing was not a quiet activity. . .nor was it predominantly a 'drawing' activity, as speech and gesture were clearly evident in his events" (1986, p. 389). The drawings of such a child would not seem impressive viewed out of the context in which they were created. They might easily be considered developmentally immature, for Jesse's drawings and the examples of dramatist work provided by Gardner (1980) resemble the controlled scribbles of much younger children. Perhaps the most significant contribution of the patterner/dramatist theory resides in the attention given to such drawings, which derive their meaning from the collaboration between verbal and visual forms of expression. For some children, drawing is a performance art; appreciation of their work requires the immediate presence of the viewer in the context in which the work is created.

Facilitating Dialogue with Young Artists

The necessity of talking to children about their art and of encouraging them to engage in dialogue with other children is not universally supported by art educators. Kellogg, for example, feared that any attempt made by adults to influence young children's art constituted interference in the delicately calibrated process of "self-taught child art" (1970 p. 145). Indeed, the developmentalist perspective of art education has produced generations of teachers who have learned to respond to children's art in

the blandly accepting, noncommittal terms favored by Kellogg: "'very interesting', 'nice colors,' 'I like that,' 'good work,' 'a nice scribble,' 'pretty,' etc." (1970, p. 156). While Kellogg considered such remarks "constructive" (1970, p. 156), others have questioned the educational value and developmental necessity of this non-interventionist approach.

Schirrmacher (1986) identified and critiqued a number of tactics used by adults when confronted by a child with drawing in hand. Three of these approaches foreclose the possibility of dialogue and abort reflection by granting the final word to the adult. Such responses--brief complementary acknowledgements, invariably positive bits of praise, and declarations of personal enthusiasm--are recognized by perceptive children as routine proclamations indiscriminately bestowed on all supplicants. Some information is elicited from the child when the question "What is it?" is posed, but as Schirrmacher pointed out, the question is rather abrupt and difficult for the child to answer. Some what "less forward and abrasive than questioning" (Schirrmacher, 1986, p. 4) is the probing approach, "Please tell me about your picture." Yet children may find this request tedious, particularly if it is overused; Schirrmacher shared the story of a first-grader who cautioned other children to conceal their drawings from their student teacher because, "'She will make you tell a real long story about it and then you have to wait while she writes it across your picture'" (1986, p. 5). Finally, Schirrmacher advised that correcting a child's drawing by pointing out discrepancies between representation and reality is inappropriate, for young children do not attempt to depict inclusive

photographic likenesses in their work.

Recognizing the inadequacy of these traditional practices, others have offered productive alternatives. Sharp (1976) proposed a method of "aesthetic extension," modelled upon the work of "Roger Broan, Courtney Cazden and others who study language development for the type of adult response to a child's statement which builds on and amplifies some aspect of meaning in the child's statement" (Smith, 1980, p. 93). Sharp offered the following scenario:

> Suppose that teachers of young children responded to children's art, not with statements of praise for having worked hard, or directions for naming or storage, but with aesthetic extensions, statements of feeling generated by the work at hand. Suppose the extensions were offered just as the child finished his work while attention lingered. And, following good practice in language, suppose the extensions were clear, tied to concrete phenomena, appropriate to the developmental levels, and presented smoothly, in a natural flowing manner. It's reasonable to assume that such statements could offer children 1) models of adult talk about the feelings found in art, 2) verbal stimulation, vocabulary, and forms of response, and 3) expanded concepts of what may be seen and felt in works of art (1976, p. 26-7).

Sparling and Sparling reduced the guiding principles for talking to a scribbling child to two: "gear to the developmental level" and "be specific" (1981, p. 270). They suggested that children in the early stages of scribbling, the random and controlled, are best served by comments which

draw attention to the movements which produce scribbles, the appearance of the marks, and the feelings of accomplishment, discovery, and control which result from the drawing activity. An adult might help the child to recall the motions which she used to effect a circular scribble, for example, by saying, "See how you make your hand go around and around--like a merry-go-round!" (Sparling and Sparling, 1981, p. 272). The character of lines, shapes or colors, the placement and relationship of marks may be discussed. The child's involvement in the activity may be acknowledged. Comments such as these, offered during or soon after the drawing event, provide a means of consummating the experience and of establishing a habit of reflection on the drawing process which will become increasingly important as the child matures. The type of statements Sparling and Sparling proposed are singularly appropriate for young children, for they avoid the premature imposition of representational notions.

Sparling and Sparling agreed that the appearance of the first named scribbles presents a "rich opportunity for communication" (1981, p. 272). However, they cautioned that, "Adults need to listen carefully to the child's comments and capitalize on the meaning to the child at that moment" (1981, p. 273). Not only does the child recognize more in the drawing than the adult is likely to detect; she may also offer a series of seemingly incompatible interpretations for the same set of marks.

At this transitional moment in the child's development, it is appropriate to expand the scope of dialogue to accommodate the child's emergent preoccupation with the content of drawings. As Leeds suggested, the

preschool child "who uses the elements and materials of art spontaneously with no consciously held ideas about them" (1986, p. 19) may be distressed by untimely discussion of formal concerns.

> No first grader, engrossed in painting a picture of her pet rabbit, is going to be helped by being asked whether the line she is about to put around her rabbit should be light or heavy. As the brush touches the paper, the proper weight of lines for her rabbit emerges as the child, paint, brush, paper, and the memory of the rabbit unite in a natural gestalt.... When verbal concepts are taught, it is more appropriate to help children identify these qualities in their own work after it has been done: "You have put a heavy line around your rabbit, it feels as though he has a lot of fur." In this manner, conceptualizing grows naturally out of personally created expression and does not become disconnected from the child's reasons for making art (Leeds, 1986, pp. 19-20).

Anderson argued that discussions which center on formal elements provide an "easy-out" for teachers who find it "much less threatening to talk about lines than about meanings and emotions and motives" (1986, p. 6). He continued, "Foremost in the child's desire to make images is a need to express some idea or emotion. A discussion that begins with and centers around line quality or color relationships does not address the child's driving concerns" (1986, p. 6).

With the discovery that marks may be used to depict objects and events, to memorialize, document, and anticipate experiences, the child enters a

period of development in which the narrative possibilities of visual form become and remain preeminent. Children of 4 and 5 years will find their preoccupation with pictorial symbols supported by conversations which originate with their own thematic intentions and address formal issues only as they pertain to the effective expression of their ideas.

Conclusion

Talking to children about their art enriches their immediate experience, and expands their understanding of the nature of visual forms and of their own activity as artists. Buber (1965) maintained that every work of art is an address, an intersubjective gesture, which seeks and deserves an answer in the response of the beholder. The child who receives such recognition, whose work and works are deemed worthy of respectful acceptance, grows in the certainty of her power to affect the world in concrete and meaningful ways. For children in the preschool years, intent on forging their own developmental paths, unprepared for the structure of elementary school art lessons, talk about art, when intimately bound to the creation of their own forms, may well be the single most effective method of art education.

The establishment of reflective habits of mind in the early years may equip children to negotiate the difficulties which will inevitably confront them as they continue to make art. The development of critical awareness depends upon the child's ability to monitor the progress of her work, to sense alternative possibilities, and to choose techniques which enhance the presentation of her ideas. Children can be taught to reflect on their

actions if such reflection is considered integral to the process of making art from its beginnings.

The concreteness of the work of art, its public availability, and the unique investment of the child in an object she has brought into being magnify its value as an impetus for dialogue between adult and child. As Hawkins acknowledged, it is difficult, if not impossible, "to befriend the child, I and Thou, in a vacuum" (1973, p. 370). Relationship requires "some third thing which is of interest to the child and to the adult, in which they can join in outward projection. Only this creates a possible stable bond of communication, of shared concern" (Hawkins, 1973, p. 370).

The talk which surrounds the drawing process may touch upon innumerable aspects of the child's world and open numerous paths to conversation. Lowenfeld (1957) maintained that children's drawings reflect their creative, mental, emotional, social, physical, and aesthetic growth, i.e., the totality of their being-in-the-world. There is much to talk about. Indeed, crayoned drawings of dinosaurs and volcanoes may serve, as the selections of children's literature used by Matthews (1980) do, as invitations to "thought experiments" (Matthews, 1980, p. 74), philosophical dialogues of great richness and variety. As Matthews observed, young children are more likely to raise philosophical questions than older, more staunchly matter-of-fact, children are. Many of the questions children pose as they draw have to do with the nature of human experience, others, with the expression of that experience through art. These ontological and aesthetic concerns provide a place for dialogue to begin.

Art experiences in the early childhood years should allow children to manipulate materials, to explore substances, to respond freely to the possibilities of visual forms. Such independent action is essential to young children's understanding of the world and their effect upon it. Yet, as Tizard and Hughes remarked, children soon need more:

> This notion of the "exploring" child, learning about the physical world by acting on it seems. . .to capture much of the essence of the very young child. But by the age of 3 or 4, we would argue that dialogue is as important as physical exploration (1984, p. 126).

The spontaneous emergence of talk in young children's graphic activities testifies to a primordial sense of connection which precedes categorization of experiences into culturally accepted compartments. Drawing is, for them, an immediate performative act, unbounded by the temporal and spatial separations adults have come to enforce between artist and beholders. The visible residue of this process may well be striking to the adult who encounters it later, stuffed into a cubby-hole or taped to a classroom wall. Clearly, any work of art represents merely a fragment of the work of the artist, but this observation is far from trivial in the case of a young child. Adults who would understand the nature of children's art and further their development must recognize and join in the dialogue through which children name and ponder, initiate and pursue, the creation of visual forms.

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